

ity, the pain of not being able to conceive (often because they left it too late) and the vulnerability of depending on men, who are much more involved in family life now than they were back then. These are the kinds of things you might think about when you read this engrossing book. Things change, and some things don't.

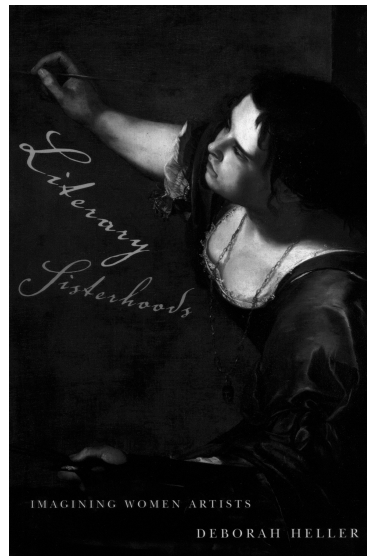
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LITERARY SISTERHOODS: IMAGINING WOMEN ARTISTS

Deborah Heller
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005

REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

"I have often felt...that most of our lives would look much uglier and more bungling than the pictures, if they could be put on the wall." This insight of George Eliot's heroine Dorothea, in *Middlemarch*, is not only a step in her own *Bildung* (self-culture) but also one of many authorial pointers to Eliot's linking, among others, the genres of the *Bildungsroman*—apprenticeship novel—and the artist novel, *Künstlerroman*. The connection between the two genres existed from their start, in Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-6), and as soon as the protagonist of such a novel was imagined as a woman, as for instance in Johanna Schopenhauer's *Gabriele* (1819), this new subgenre was classified as the novel of renunciation—*Entsagungsroman*. Deborah Heller



discusses a group of major works of fiction by women authors that portray a female protagonist's development as both a woman and an artist in her social, political, and cultural milieu: Germaine de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Anna Banti's *Artemisia* (1947), Alice Munro's short-story collection *Friend of My Youth* (1990), and Grace Paley's collections *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959) and *Enormous Changes at the Last Moment* (1974). "Sisterhood" in this study is three-fold: intertextually, the heroines form a genealogy of the fictional woman artist; intratextually, they serve in the earlier works as exemplary figures of the constraints that the ideology of separate spheres imposes on their more conventional sisters; and metatextually, their dialogic relationship with their (female) author reflects the challenge, pride, and cost of an artistic vocation.

A modern, feminist reading of *Corinne* leads Heller to disagree with both Mme de Staël's implied reader and with most critics. She sees the celebrated lyrical singer's conflict between her vocation and love not as tragic but merely pathetic, the result of her poor choice in love. More congenial to a modern sensibility is a generally neglected secondary character, Mme d'Arbigny, who appears

only as mediated in the hero's narrative. She exhibits the unchaste and resilient life that her author was famous for, whereas the chaste and despairing Corinne obeys the implicit rules of the genre. Heller finds similar authorial ambivalence in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, where Eliot treats the gendered difference in the characters' "horizons" of education, vocation, and experience at most with irony when not uncritically, while voicing denunciation only through a minor character, in a short episode, further softening the impact by making the explicit target Jewish rather than English patriarchy. However, by having *Deronda*'s mother, the Alcharisi, defend her choice of a career as an opera singer over her motherly duties, Eliot exposes the heroine Gwendolen's genteel amateurish "bungling"; and she questions the idealization of Gwendolen's foil, Mirah's modest and less public, that is, more feminine, career as a drawing-room singer. Much more thoroughly than George Eliot, Anna Banti enters into and sustains an explicit dialogue and imaginary reciprocal support with the famous seventeenth-century painter Artemisia Gentileschi—creating a post-modern hybrid that is part realistic psychological fiction, part art history, and part life-writing. Banti starts with the traumatic destruction of Florence in World War Two and the consequent destruction of her first version of a historical novel on the painter; she connects her experience of political violence with the sexual violence and professional obstacles experienced by her heroine, on occasion distorting the historical record in order to increase the shared sense of female vulnerability.

As a result of their "foremothers" struggles, Alice Munro and Grace Paley can treat their heroines' literary vocation "with less fanfare," frequently revealing it only implicitly or late in the text. In her discussion of their collections of short stories, the main genre of both authors, Heller

focuses on the protagonist's role as narrator, whether literary or oral, the shifting of moral authority with narrative authority, and the deferment of moral judgment by means of one or several codas, or revisions, from different perspectives. "Relation" means for Heller both the protagonists' relation with others, especially in mother-daughter relations, and narration, a main theme in Munro's stories being the "getting loose" from boundaries of both gender and genre. Paley's character Faith "does work" for her author, in Paley's own words, by registering her New York community's conflicts of generations, the sexes, Old and New World mentalities, and Jewish memories of disasters and the American promise of happiness. As Heller follows Faith's increasing political and social engagement beyond her family and friends, she clarifies what is to some critics paradoxical, namely the coexistence in Faith of a sanguine temperament and a pessimistic world view, which Paley has also described as her own complex attitude. Heller writes approvingly: "The horrors of the wider world are not denied, but they do not extinguish the value of personal experience." This balance, or oscillation, is coded as female, in contrast to the uniformly bleak attitude of Faith's male lover.

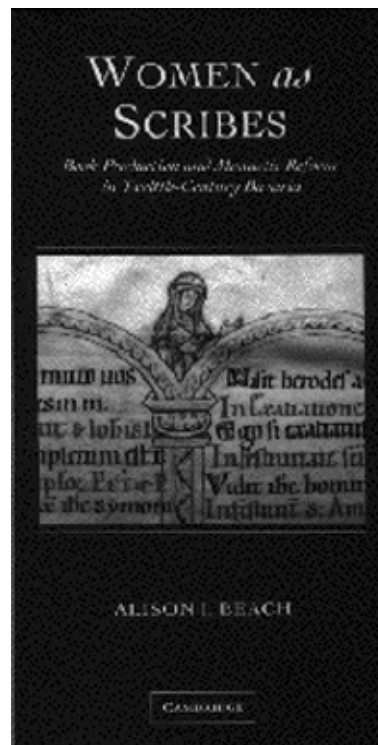
Heller's book gathers together in a coherent, persuasive, and eminently readable account new work and revisions of journal articles published over an extended period. The diverse choice of works, judicious historical contextualizing, astute literary criticism and positioning within the scholarly debates, and the wise judgments on the works' psychological and moral issues make Heller's study also a work of her own life-writing, or "autocritography," through which she joins the sisterhood of the women authors and characters.

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WOMEN AS SCRIBES

Alison Beach
Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004

REVIEWED BY JENNIFER CHURCH



On a day not unlike any other in 1992, in the state of Michigan, an online discussion took place among several scholars, one of whom was Alison Beach. This conversation, perhaps long forgotten by most of its participants, marked for Beach the nascent stages of her research focus for the next several years. Asked a seemingly simple question by one of her colleagues, "Did women copy books in the Middle Ages?" Beach became preoccupied with unearthing an adequate answer – an answer that has culminated in her most recent book, *Women as Scribes*. A concentrated, nearly exhaustive analysis of three Bavarian monasteries, Wessobrunn, Admont and Schäftlarn, *Women as Scribes* sifts through time-

ravished manuscripts, necrologies, booklists, charters and exegetical texts, in an attempt to expose women's extensive participation in scribal activity in twelfth-century Germany. Beach only looks beyond these three monasteries in her introduction whereby she gives her reader a succinct overview of the history of female scribal activity that led to the flourishing of women copyists in Bavaria.

After highlighting specific events and circumstances, such as the success of the double monastery in Germany that cultivated a "favorable climate for female scribes," Beach launches into a discussion of the convictions underlying her methodology. Declaring that handwriting alone is not an accurate means by which to determine a scribe's gender, that sound paleographical analysis must accompany the identification of a scribe's hand, Beach adopts a more "critical approach." She takes into consideration stylistic variations, collaborative possibilities, availability of material supplies and working conditions, as evidence of female hands is sought out in manuscript colophons and "literary works and monastery records." Aware that little scholarship has been written on the participation of more "ordinary women" – everyday nun-scribes – as copyists, specifically in Germanic lands, Beach asserts that for the most part, such an unfortunate occurrence is symptomatic of a belief in the notion that handwriting is gendered.

Noting that penmanship in the Middle Ages was an art form and therefore prone to stylistic changes, Beach, a connoisseur of locating female scribes, scrutinizes the individual shape and formation of particular letters and symbols. She includes an analysis of the typography of telling letters and signs, such as the letters "b," "g," and "p," the employment of ligatures in a text, and the inclusion and/or exclusion of ampersands, to name a few, to successfully match a text to its female scribe(s). Most admirable in her quest